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AN ANALYSIS OF THE NOVEL THE BRICK COURTYARD

- North Vietnam -

by Phan Nhan

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE NOVEL THE BRICK COURTYARD

- North Vietnam -

Following is a translation of an analysis by Phan Nhan of the novel, The Brick Courtyard, by Dao Vu. This analysis appeared in the Vietnamese-language periodical, Nghien Cuu Van Hoc (Literary Study), Hanoi, No. 4, April 1960, pages 14-23, 51.

A. A Useful Literary Discussion

Perhaps The Brick Courtyard is the first novel on agricultural collectivization subjected to the most intensive discussions and most heated debate.

Following three sessions of discussion organized by the Cultural Institute in collaboration with the Society of Writers, almost all the newspapers carried editorial comments and expressed their opinions on the novel The Brick Courtyard. The magazine Nghien Cuu Van Hoc itself devoted two articles to the discussions.

On the whole, the discussions on the novel are centered on three main ideas:

1. Old Am, the central figure of the novel

This is the subject which is most discussed and which engenders the most heated debate. Most of the editorial comments are devoted exclusively to the subject matter of the novel, i.e., Old Am. Most of them agree that Old Am is an individual with his own particular character and with a very active inner self. But when it comes to reassessing the true value and the symbolic contents of the main character, there are many divergent opinions, often conflicting.

One category of comments maintains that the characterization of Old Am in The Brick Courtyard is successful, saying that he is "a rather unique symbol of a class of farmers of the delta of the North." (To Hoai, Literary Digest, No. 2-1960.) Successful, because the novel brings forward the complex character and his inner conflicts when the farmer of North Vietnam is faced with the movement of agricultural collectivization, because Old Am is a person rather true to life, having his own individual character, "in flesh and blood, presenting a variety of facets, and having many contradictions always conflicting with each other." (Dai Hien, Culture, No. 68.) When the author solves the problem by bringing Old Am in the collective, the author has solved at the same time a number of conflicting questions besetting the old man's mind, for instance, sense of private property, confusion about professions, patriarchal manners, traditional ways of doing business, old customs and habits, etc. (Nguyen Van Bong, Arts, No. 29.)

Another category of comments, although different from the former in degree, declare that Old Am's "inner self is not progressing on the same pace with his actual achievements in labor." (Nguyen Hung and Thiet Vu, Literary Digest, No. 3-1960.) His mind is always working one way, and is so imbued with negative considerations, i.e., the ones which are against collectivization that the positive side does not show up. Some critics say that the "creation of the main character does not fit with the logic of the objective facts which unfold continuously. The deficiency is caused by the fact that the author is not able to see Old Am in his entirety." (Le Dien and Trong Anh, Nhan Dan, February 17, 1960.) Some critics wonder why "from beginning to end, the author won't let Old Am acquire a single progressive idea. It seems that the author is reluctant to see the mind of his main character bothered by the conflict of ideas imposed on him by external events." (The Toan, Study, No. 2-1960.)

Concerning the typical quality of the main character of the novel, some of the critics who are concerned with the personality of Old Am more than with any other factors, wrote that "the author could choose any person to be his central character, provided that in the process of building up that role and erecting the structure of the novel, the central character must fit in with his stand in life, go through the process of dialectical change, and that dialectical change must progress on the same pace with the change of the environment." (Nguyen Hung and Thiet Vu, Literary Digest, No. 3-1960.)

The majority of other critics do not think that Old Am is the typical character of the novel. Their main reasons are:

"Old Am's thoughts as described in the novel, are not progressing according to the rules, they are not normal; and to be abnormal means to be particular, and thus, not to be typical," (Xuan Tuu, Literature, No. 80.)

"Old Am is not yet the representative of the masses of the farmers (i.e., those who participate directly in production), and thus, he is not the right person to serve best the theme that the author wants to advocate," (Le Dien and Trong Anh, Nhan Dan, op. cit.)

"the choice of a person who, instead of being part of his ricefield, stands beside the anvil of his blacksmith's shop to talk about things such as whether or not to participate in agricultural collectivization, is not a fortunate choice, and thus we see that Old Am is not the personage that the author wants him to be." (The Toan, Study, No. op. cit.)

2. The implementation of the policy of the party in the agricultural collectivization campaign

A number of articles refer more specifically to the questions of leadership of the party and declare that "in The Brick Courtyard the roles of the political cell, of the Central Committee, of the chief editor and sub-editor, and of the League of Labor Youth are left undefined and still vague.

Some critics bring out the question of the self-commitment principle of the collectivization campaign. They say that because of the fact that farmers in general lack an education in the thought process, that Old Am himself is not sufficiently educated, and that the whole locality seems to concur in Old Am's sense of isolation that gives him the impression of being surrounded. Consequently, that creates the impression that Old Am is being forced to join the collective. That question of the self-commitment principle, although not in itself a subject of heated debate nor of great concern for many people, nevertheless is becoming one of the subjects currently discussed and provides the subject matter of some articles.

On the question of the implementation of the policies of the classes in the countryside, there are some scattered questions, such as: Why are not the poor farmers of Cau Quay collective, who are the most active of people, present in the novel?

3. The question of the appearance of the new life in the countryside and the emergence of the new man

This question is not in itself the subject of heated debate and does not involve deep analysis, but it is often referred to by many critics. Almost everybody welcomes the intention of the author of The Brick Courtyard in the idea of contributing to the collectivization campaign and the fervor he has shown toward the farmers. That awareness of purpose and that fervor could be seen, not only in the choice of the theme and in the building of the plot, but also in terms of its role as a mirror of the countryside living, by bringing to life the exciting and agreeable activities of labor production, and at the same time, portraying the role of the new man of the delta of North Vietnam.

So far those are the main ideas and opinions appearing in the newspapers about the novel.

This is a new and healthy phenomenon in our cultural life. With regard to the tasks of literary criticism and studies, this is an entirely new step and a new phenomenon. Naturally, through criticism and exchange of ideas about The Brick Courtyard, we notice that our literary criticism is not solely limited to the comments on the contents of the novel, interspersed with general remarks on the good and bad points. We do not deny that such kinds of criticism still exist here and there. But many critics in their comments go deep into the analysis of the main theme, into the study of the main characters, along with the changes in their inner selves and their actions, their environment and social life, etc.... Almost all the comments refer to the value of the novel as a reflection of true life. They stress the study of the main theme, the art of interpreting life, and emphasize the technique of building the characters of various people in the novel. A number of comments even analyze the creative talent of the author. Such kinds of comments not only make the author re-evaluate his own creation, but also contribute to the promotion of the creative arts and to the quantitative improvement of literary works. We should welcome such kinds of comments.

B. The Accomplishments and Deficiencies of 'The Brick Courtyard'

It is our opinion that the value of a literary work, in the last analysis, lies in its ability to reflect true life. Thus, when talking about the success or failure of a masterpiece, we refer to the extent of its ability to be a mirror of true life.

After reading The Brick Courtyard, what have we seen?

First of all, we are able to notice a number of phenomena in the new life in the countryside at present. We are able to observe various scenes of collective living, its pleasant and active aspects, labor production in its active phases, and also, the newly blossomed love between boys and girls, possessing the same ideals. Worth seeing are the scenes of evaluating the prices of water buffaloes for public ownership, sessions of insect extermination in the corn fields, and the scenes of pumping water in the ricefields, etc. Such lively scenes bring immediately to the mind the picture of a newly emerged countryside, born in a new atmosphere that we have never seen anywhere except in dreams.

We are able to see the whole generation of new young people of the new regime. They carry all the fervor and confidence in the collectivization campaign of the socialist regime. They are the promoters of a new period and the creators of a new atmosphere in our countryside. They have the ability and potentiality of attracting us. Through them, we are able to see the really active and pleasant life of the countryside. I would like to refer to the young people of The Brick Courtyard, namely Trong, Quyen, Cham, etc....

They are people of almost the same age bracket, and perhaps they come from families of the same background and have the same status. They have now the same ideal, that is, the eagerness to build the collective life in order to speed up the advance to socialism. They share the same dream of being able to live as in the Soviet Union where farms have electricity and mechanical plows. Although they share the same ideals, they are not young people being tailored from the same model: they are different from each other, having different behavior, characters, gestures and ways of speaking. Trong is courageous, active, quick to anger, at times rash, "having somewhat his father's blood," emotional, "disappointed at one moment and red with anger when things do not seem to be right." Quyen, "somewhat tall, slender like the tree 'san,' is only 17 years old, but very often she can "break the record by carrying 98 kilos on her shoulders." Quyen pours water into the ricefields like the regular movements of a loom, and even in the moments of rest from work, she is still full of pep and indulges in mischief. She pours water with two pails, and her movements are so fast that one gets dizzy easily just by looking at her.

Of all these people, Cham is the girl who is more remarkable than the others in terms of portrayal. Cham is not beautiful, but it is difficult to forget her traits after seeing her. "Her looks are straight, and she does not hesitate to look right into the eyes of the other person, even if the other person happens to be a boy. Cham is

like a cactus tree which grows wherever there is soil, no matter how it is planted. Cham eats heartily and is happy with plain food. Cham is simple like a lump of earth, and dresses always simply." Even so, despite a quiet appearance, her mind is not without storms and conflicts. Life was not so easy when she was born, and that fact makes her wonder at her actual lot. Cham does not hate her husband Con, the son of Tuy the landowner, but she does not think she can ever live with him all her life. But Old Am (Cham's father) high handedly wants her to be "faithful to the last" to that compulsory husband. How will Cham react about this? Is it true that "the pieces of wood have been fastened to the bark and cannot be dismantled?" Or, "Wash him out, and be over with the whole thing?"

Besides that group of young and active people, there are also a number of other people representing the leadership of the party in the agricultural collectivization campaign. There are Comrades Hien, Hoi, etc. These people also have their own characters, and although they appear in momentary flashes in the novel, they are not a negligible lot. They contribute to bringing to life the lively scenes of collective living at Cau Quay and cannot be omitted.

In addition to the new scenes of collective living and the sympathetic people mentioned above, we are able to see through The Brick Courtyard the remnants of the old generation. These people still carry antiquated thoughts and habits of an old society or are devastated by the same old vestiges of the past. They are: Old Am, Mrs. Tao Long, and Khang's wife.

Old Am is the main character, the central figure of the novel. It is clear that Author Dao-Vu has centered his efforts in the portrayal of Old Am. In order to convey to the readers the main theme of the novel, the author intends to bring into view the inner conflicts in Old Am's mind when he has to face the new life and new environment. The author has accomplished part of his intention when he portrays the authoritarian traits and the complex aspects of that middle-income farmer. We welcome The Brick Courtyard, partly because of the efforts of the author in his characterization of Old Am.

I agree with a number of critics that in The Brick Courtyard, especially with the characterization of Old Am, author Dao-Vu has gone deep into the collectivization campaign, delved into the mind of the farmers and avoided over-simplification in his portrayal of Old Am, as many others have done so far.

Old Am is indeed a rather complex person. The author has exposed many facets of that complex character. The old man is a middle income farmer and a handicraft worker, the owner of three houses built with logwood, of 2 acres of land, of healthy water buffalo, employing many farm hands and operating a blacksmith shop. It is natural that the old man has a calculating mind, "knowing how to barter water buffaloes' labor for man's labor," and "after just one year, he is well off." He is somewhat stubborn as when he was young. He was once Assistant Chief of the village for a number of years. He is now the

head of the family and supervises every household task. A few sentences that he knows by rote from the 'classical books' inevitably contribute to his tendency of clinging to things past. It is not without basis that Old Am imposes his will on his daughter, such things like "the pieces of wood being fastened to the bark and cannot be dismantled," or "you must be faithful to the end." In the period of land reform, the old man was considered as a rich farmer and a high-handed man. Thus, he views life from the viewpoint of a bully; for instance, he used to say that "life is full of forms, and at the same time, formless," and "a service is a debt." He has prejudices toward loyal cadres; he is angry at Trong; his son wants to take his life; he is angry at his daughter-in-law, Comrade Hien, a deputy commissioner, sub-editor of the collective, because he claims that she is not being able to help him whatsoever. With his mind full of prejudices and having to face the new life, the old man cannot avoid having confused, contradictory ideas and feelings, to the extent of becoming hasty and mixed up. At times, he criticized the collectives as being "the places where people slave without the least idea that they may die for overwork," and as places where people "come and go at the tunes of the drums." At the news of good harvests, the old man "saw no fun at all, being like a placid observer," but when he comes to the house, he "cannot hide his pleasure" after he eavesdrops his son's conversations. Although Old Am's thoughts are not progressing according to the rules, although many psychological aspects of the old man are still in conflict, -- we will argue about these points a little later, -- Author Dao-Vu has nevertheless succeeded in bringing into view the confused aspects which still persist in the mind of a man belonging to the old class of confused farmers like Old Am.

Considering the success of The Brick Courtyard, we have first to mention the author's knowledge of the countryside and the farmers. In the efforts of elaborating on the characteristic traits of Old Am, I am aware that Author Dao-Vu got his first-hand knowledge of his character at the Cau Quay collective. The profound observation of the real model of the farmer at that collective has helped the author in the portrayal of the confused mind of the main character of the novel.

In the study about young people, we can say that the author has known thoroughly his subjects and their talks, just as we know about our neighbors. It seems that his talent lies in his ability to discover poetry in the thoughts and feelings of the new generation, as well as in the buoyant life in the countryside at present.

The concise and lively sentence structure adds to the efforts of Author Dao-Vu to find poetry in the new people and in their way of living. Poetry comes as a natural flow under his pen. Not only do words and ways of speaking fit perfectly with his characters, the style also modulates itself with the change in their thoughts and feelings, when the author wants to show their inner selves.

"Cham does not hate him, but she has no love either for him... The young men in the village gossip about it: that was a liaison in the feudal way, that was not a marriage in the true sense, now it is considered as 'washed up'." Even Cham does not know what she ought to do with him... But, on the other hand, to insist that Cham is a married woman, that she is Mrs. Con, and has to go back to belong to him for the whole lifetime, that is really a burden... Cham does not reject him because he was ugly and uncouth, because "it is really idle talk when saying that this one is ugly or handsome," not because he lacks manners, because "whether with good or bad manners, boys are always stronger than girls".... (page 50.)

We have mentioned the real achievements of The Brick Courtyard. What then are the deficiencies?

I agree with To-Hoai that the young people in Dao-Vu's novel "are not mature intellectually" and have no well-formed ideas yet. "The characterization even of Cham is not well delineated yet, because it is still superficial." Indeed these young people are still immature in their thinking, (I want to refer to the kind of thinking of young people in general about the future of collectivization, their degree of concern for the work to be done, their comments on this or that person.) Furthermore, the young people of the novel do not have the same dreams of other people of their age. Against the background of active life that we have seen, they seem to have a one-way enthusiasm in life. Even their love, for instance that between Quyen and Trong, is being used solely to ornament the story. In the last analysis, it is difficult to know the ideas, interests and dreams of the young people in the novel. It is almost impossible to see through their minds.

A number of other characters also lack definition. I think that Comrade Hien's role is no less important in the context of the novel. The author sets the character of Comrade Hien in a prominent position which immediately draws our attention, because she is at the same time Old Am's daughter-in-law, under commissar, and sub-editor of the collective. In terms of that position, the portrayal of Comrade Hien ought to be more clear-cut and well delineated from the viewpoint of background, behavior and character. The author ought to make Comrade Hien more active and bring her role into relief. The leadership of the regional organization of the party could be seen through her. More personal traits are needed. Khang's wife could be seen as typical of backward people, but her backwardness is of a different type from that of Old Am. It is to be regretted that the author did not take advantage of that fact to make a more laborious study in depth.

What about the portrayal of Old Am himself? On this point, I do not agree with To-Hoai that "Old Am is characterized as typical of a class of farmers of the delta of the North." Indeed, Old Am is a rather confusing and complex person, and, as we have seen, the author succeeds in presenting many factors which form the basis of his complex

character. But because the development of the characterization of Old Am progresses only in one direction, and does not reflect the objective truth, Old Am cannot be considered typical. In our present-day society, every person, of no matter from what class, carries with him a host of complex ideas, feelings, and opinions resulting from the cross-currents of economic, political, and social factors, familial patterns, social relations, customs, habits, and ways of life. Amid such an array of complex factors, every person has a basic particular character. This particular character surges to the fore and determines important actions of the individual, although he is to go through long drawn-out contradictions and conflicts.

From the way Author Dao-Vu presents his character to the readers, the basic character of Old Am is that of a laborer. Once a farmer and having been a mine worker for 7 years, Old Am used to have arguments with the head of the team and later on, returned to his village with his bag and his nostrils full of coal dust. He then cultivated his own plot of land and worked as a blacksmith in his shop. This basic character determines the extent of receptive ability concerning new ideas, feelings and awareness, as well as progress. It appears that the factors of backwardness are still strong in Old Am's mind and prevent him from accepting the new. But conflicts and contradictions are inevitable. The awareness of the new and the persistence of the backward are in conflict. When the objective circumstances are favorable to one of the two aspects, that aspect will be prominent. This results in a long drawn-out struggle until the basic character is transformed into the other aspect. Through psychological changes in Old Am's mind, we see nothing but disillusionment, frustration, and bitterness springing from the backward aspect of his mind instead of the thoughts, calculations, and rationale of his basic character.

Besides, it appears that the favorable external circumstances, especially the economic factors, do not have a good influence on him, and at times go against him. On the one hand, the agricultural collectivization campaign is progressing by leaps and bounds, resulting in good harvests, and on the other hand, the negative aspect of the old man increases proportionately. When the collectivization campaign results in good harvests, everyone goes with great pleasure to pay taxes, but Old Am recalls incidentally the old times when people were rounded up for failing to pay taxes to the government. His thoughts jump to the idea of forcing his daughter Cham to go back to her husband Con (page 158.)

When everyone joins the collective, and when his family has been in it for 6 months, the old man never for a moment considers the advantages of collectivization. On the contrary, he considers that the movement "pushes him to the end of the road." (page 168) Old Am's mind, in Author Dao-Vu's portrayal, is that of one who lives "in times of prosperity" taking them for granted, instead of living by the toil of his labor; that is, he is of the mentality of those who despair of

losing everything if they ever join the collectives. He sets himself a rationale: "There is nothing left but plugging the ears with the head turban, and everybody chooses his own way." That kind of reasoning leads him to this conclusion, "Yes, this old man finally has to leave... I have to leave, to quit this place." And as if to find a logic for his "strenuous" resolution, the old man reasons like a worker who lives by the sweat of his toil, saying "These two arms can still lift a hatchet, and I am not afraid of dying of hunger." "I will come back to my work of miner for a living." (page 169)

How contradictory he is! How could it be that way? One doubts that the author wants to prepare for Old Am's trip to Dong-Trieu in the following chapter and that he wants to mould it according to the author's subjective considerations. Ultimately, the fact that Old Am joins the collective is not the result of the objective development of the old man's character.

It is for that reason that some critics maintain that Old Am is being forced to join the collective, and if that is true, there is a violation of the principle of self-commitment to collectivization. In my opinion, the question here is not indeed a question of self-commitment or non-commitment; but it is a question of not portraying the psychological change of the main character in accordance with the real objective situation.

Another deficiency of the novel is that the author tends to mirror the way of living in one direction. Everybody knows fully well that our countryside at present is progressing rapidly and continuously. But that is not accomplished without difficulties. We have undergone every kind of catastrophe: flood, hurricane, drought, insect invasion which still plague the farmers. In addition, the still backward technology and old-fashioned habits of doing things aggravate the existing difficulties. These are the difficulties in general. But in the collectives in particular, there are the problems arising from the collectivization campaign itself, and from the difficulties of separate collectives. Those are the difficulties arising from growth, from the contradiction between the people not belonging to the collectives and the collectivized farmers, and from opposition between collective agents. There are also difficulties arising from hesitations, from confusions, from lack of experience in the field of collective management, from mistakes and errors in the implementation of collective policies, and especially, from difficulties of thought education, because the level of awareness of the farmers towards socialism is still very low.

On reading The Brick Courtyard, we notice that the collective at Cau Quay has a fast growth reaching a high level. But it is felt that there are nevertheless a few problems and efforts to overcome difficulties, for instance, the sessions of insect extermination in the corn fields at night, the so-called "4-pound opinions" causing perplexities among people, etc.... But the extent of such difficulties does not

convey the picture of the difficulties of the countryside which are indeed complex. Naturally, it is not necessary to mention these difficulties in the framework of such a novel. It is not even necessary to evaluate the degree of these difficulties and advantages. The main thing is to present the typical traits in order to mirror more authentically the true facts. The basic facts here are the Cau Quay collective, and the people outside the collective and the collective members in the general picture of 1958.

In addition to the pleasant scenes of collective living and labor production, the picture of the field of collective management cannot be neglected. The role of collective leadership needs to be better delineated with stronger strokes of the brush. This kind of reference to the above facts in the true life of the collective is necessary. They have a strong influence on the ideas and actions of many people, and sometimes, on the progress of the characterization of different roles in the novel. This lack of emphasis, reflecting only partially the true life of the collective, makes other deficiencies more evident. Why should the portrayal of the characters of the novel be so shallow and one way? Because, on the one hand, as To-Hoai has said, "there is lack of elaboration, lack of study of the many facets of true life," and, on the other hand, because, the author sets them in an improper locale. It is for that reason that as individuals, the characters of the novel lack depth and meaning of purpose, and that the collective environment does not stir them to more ponderous thinking. It is to be stressed that the role of the environment is indeed important. It suffices to take the examples of the events about "4-pound" and "9-pound" from the novel: we see at once that they stir people to more thinking and reappraisal, and from then on the individual characters are visibly better delineated. Except for Old Am, the psychological reaction of these people is evident. Trong's character is more evident through these events. The role of Comrade Hien as leader at Cau Quay collective is also more accentuated. As far as Old Am is concerned, it is my opinion that if Author Dao-Vu creates the necessary factors for Old Am to get into contact with the collectivization program, with advantageous as well as disadvantageous implications, especially with the facts of collective leadership and management, the psychological transformation of Old Am would have more opportunity to progress more objectively, and thus to move closer to factual reality.

Concerning deficiencies, we notice that Author Dao-Vu being still young, has not a profound knowledge of people and life in general. He makes real efforts to understand and portray many categories of young people. He is excellent in catching the active and buoyant side of youth, and in capturing the poetic traits. But he is not expert in exploring many corners and hidden sides of their soul. The author has the same attitude towards life: the tendency to see one direction of it, the inability to visualize the complete picture, the lack of depth in perception, and the predilection for picturing animated scenes.

With regard to Old Am, although Author Dao-Vu makes efforts to study his model thoroughly, he has no opportunity to study other Old Ams, and thus, could not master the typical traits of his main character. He is so preoccupied with jamming many particular traits in the mind of the old man that he overlooks Old Am's basic character that he wants to present to the reader. In the final analysis, although he labors a great deal, he has not been able to create an Old Am close to reality.

In summary, the achievements and deficiencies of The Brick Courtyard centered around the degree of knowledge about life, the sense of observation, the ability to generalize life and to make it concrete. Having understood partly life around him, Author Dao-Vu scores a limited success. But because Dao-Vu lacks experience in life and overlooks the complete picture of life, he encounters difficulties in the building of his characters and in the reflection of true life.

C. The Problems to be Solved

Comrades The Toan, Le Dien and Trong Anh (1) brought up the question of subject matter and the typical people in The Brick Courtyard.

I venture to present some of my opinions on this subject.

There are two aspects worth considering:

First, what should be a typical person? In my opinion, a typical character in a society or in an era is the person who represents the forces of the new society in a definite period of history. In the society of our generation, the typical person is one who comes from the ranks of industry, agriculture and army, or one who belongs to the classes of industrial or agricultural workers, and soldiers, determined to struggle for the success of socialism. It is through the portrayal and the building of this person, the description of his ethics, his thoughts, his feelings, and his actions that the portrayal of the society is possible. That is the typical person which proclaims the theme of the new society and of the new people. In other cases, the typical person is the one who is most representative of his class. There is the typical person of a progressive generation as well as the typical person of undecided, backward or reactionary classes. According to the realist concept of a literary work, the character which is built up successfully by the author, whether the main character or a subordinate one, is the typical one. The fighting goal of the writer must be: Any character must be typical. In the context of such meaning, Old Am in The Brick Courtyard could be a typical character, provided that the construction of his character were successful; that is, if he were being elaborated as a central figure, having both his individual traits, and at the same time, carrying the typical traits of the class of old farmers such as Old Am.

The second aspect of the problem is: Given such a theme, what would be the proper character? In other words, is it appropriate to choose Old Am as a middle income farmer with a subordinate profession and to build him as the central figure?

I think that the choice of the main character of the novel depends on the author. It is evident that with a certain category of persons, a larger theme can be elaborated, while with another category, a smaller theme is appropriate. For instance, if the theme is the whole movement of agricultural collectivization, where the role of leadership needs to be brought into relief, the author could choose an agent of the party to be the main character, as So-lo-khop has chosen Da-vu-dop in The Fallow Earth. If the theme is smaller in implication and extent, for instance, about the attitudes of different classes of working people in the movement of collectivization, we could choose a middle-income farmer, progressive or backward, to be the main character. Or smaller still, as in the case of The Brick Courtyard, where Author Dao-Vu simply wants to present his theme, that, in the face of the agricultural collectivization campaign, a category of farmers such as Old Am may have to go through many conflicts and contradictions before stepping on the road to socialism. If the theme is only that, the choice of Old Am as the main character is not to be criticized. Thus, the theme would be restricted, and, consequently, its value as a true mirror of reality and its educational worth would become also restricted.

March 1, 1960.

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